

House Armed Services Committee

DEMOCRATS

*For immediate release
March 9, 2005*

Ike Skelton, Ranking Member

<http://www.house.gov/hasc/democrats>

Contact:

Loren Dealy,
HASC Democratic Communications
(202) 226-6339

Lara Battles,
Rep. Skelton
(202)-225-2876

House Armed Services Committee Hears Testimony from Three Regional Commands

Washington D.C.—Today Congressman Ike Skelton (MO), Ranking Member on the House Armed Services Committee, delivered the following statement during a hearing that featured Commanders from Southern Command, European Command and Pacific Command.

“Mr. Chairman, I join you in welcoming General Jones, General Craddock, and Admiral Fallon. I want to thank all of you at the outset for the men and women you lead. We have learned in the last four years that campaigns in one part of the world affect our forces globally. Your troops are fighting terrorism in remote theaters and in deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. They are also defending other vital American interests around the world. We are grateful for the extraordinary sacrifices that they and their families are making, and we commend their service.

“Admiral Fallon, I’d like to start by welcoming you in your first testimony before this committee. It only gets easier with each visit. I had the pleasure of traveling out to Pacific Command headquarters with seven members of this committee, and two other colleagues, on our way to China and South Korea in January.

“There was some reason for optimism on that trip. China’s economic growth increasingly ties it both to Taiwan and to us. There has been cooperation between our two nations in the global war on terrorism. Most significantly, China has an important role to play in a negotiated outcome to the North Korean nuclear crisis—and we must reach one.

“But I came back from that trip with an impression that the Taiwan Straits was one of the most dangerous places on earth. Events of the recent weeks have only deepened that feeling. China’s draft anti-secession law risks upsetting the delicate balance in the Strait. So too does the European Union’s threat to lift the existing embargo on arms sales to China, particularly at a time when China is greatly modernizing its military. I have opposed legislation in the past that would have upset the balance across the Strait by increasing military exchanges with Taiwan. But China’s current

domestic legislation risks igniting a potential powder keg of miscalculation and conflict. I urge their restraint and reconsideration.

“General Jones, it is great to see you testifying again. You are in command during a time of extraordinary change for the NATO alliance and for our presence in Europe. I don’t believe this is a bad thing. In fact, I think it’s a good thing. A changed American footprint may allow for new opportunities in Eastern Europe and Africa. Our presence has been an important foundation of our alliance relationships; we must remember that. I hope you’ll update us on how the changes are going.

“I am pleased to see enhanced partnership with our European allies in Afghanistan and Iraq. NATO is making progress in Afghanistan by increasing its role. That nation has a long way to go in building a lasting democratic government and particularly in combating the drug problem that threatens its stability. NATO’s contributions through the Provincial Reconstruction Teams demonstrate the commitment of our allies to Afghanistan’s long-term success.

“We know that success in Iraq lies with the training and equipping of effective Iraqi security forces. This committee has heard a lot of testimony on that subject in recent weeks. It is a very positive step to have our European allies commit to help in this effort, including in the development of professional military education. Helping the Iraqis provide for their own security is an effort we should all support. I hope we continue to work with our European friends toward this goal.

“General Craddock, we welcome you to your first testimony before this committee as well. When General Hill was here last year, the major topic we discussed was the increase in the cap on American military personnel in Colombia. As you know, I opposed the increase in that cap. This is not because I believe President Uribe is not making progress against the guerilla groups in Colombia—I believe he is. I worry though about the sustainability of that effort and the strain on American forces in the process. American investment in Colombia has been substantial—well over a billion dollars. I hope you’ll update us on what the progress has been there and what the timeline for success looks like.

“In the Southern Command area, I would also like to mention the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay. I appreciate in your statement, General Craddock, that you lay out the legal proceedings that are being made available to detainees there. The allegations of abuse are disturbing and must be investigated seriously. I appreciate your appointment of Lieutenant General Schmidt to oversee the investigation and expect that you will keep this committee informed of the results of that investigation.

“Thank all three of you for your service. I look forward to your testimony. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

###